

# British, European or an Anglophone citizen of the world? How Britons identify themselves



*What makes a Briton more likely to feel European? Laurie Hanquinet (University of York) analyses a survey carried out in 2012 and finds cultural tastes, social networks and travel in Europe predispose people to identify more closely with Europe. However, Britons who travel widely outside the EU tend to identify strongly with the wider Anglophone world – something that may have influenced the Brexit vote.*

To what extent can a trip to another European country, experience of living abroad, contacts with foreign friends, a non-national partner, or even watching television in a different language and a taste for European traditional music make us feel European? And how different can feeling European be from a wider cosmopolitan identification to the world?



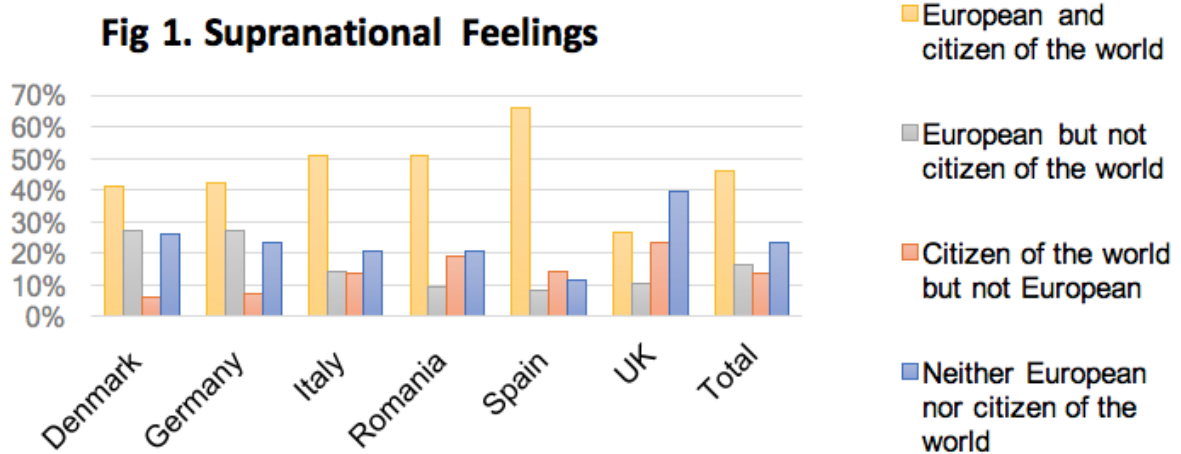
Folk music at Neckar, Baden-Wurttemberg, Germany. Photo: [Ralf Schulze](#) via a [CC-BY-SA 2.0 licence](#)

In a [recent paper](#) published in the European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology, Mike Savage and I explored whether cross-border practices were capable of fostering some attachment to Europe. We used the EU-funded [EUCROSS survey](#) (FP7), a wide-ranging survey of physical and virtual mobility and practices of cultural consumption as reported by nationals of six European countries (Denmark, Germany, Italy, Romania, Spain, and the UK). Around 1000 people in each country were interviewed by phone in 2012 – after the 2008 crisis, but before Brexit. Although the research has never been about the referendum itself, it helps us understand how the UK feels about Europe. And there is no simple picture.

## National, European and global identities

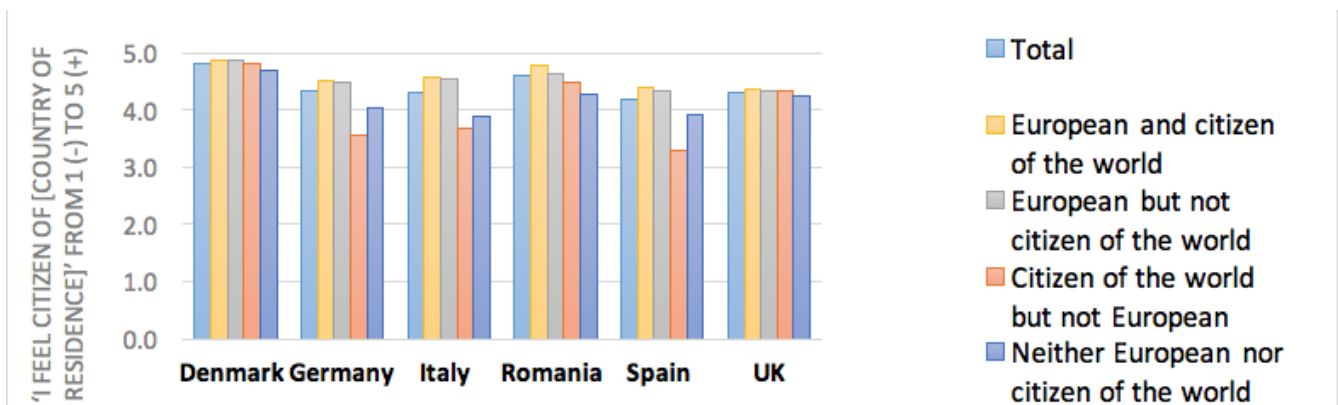
Around 50% of our sample has both ‘European’ and ‘world’ identities but there is a sizeable group – about a third – who have one, but not the other, identity. Figure 1 shows that the British responses are distinctive in two ways. Firstly, Britons are much more likely to see themselves as neither ‘citizens of the world’, nor of Europe, than any other nation. However, with 40%, there is no simple nationalist majority even in the UK. Secondly, Britons are more likely to see themselves as citizens of the world – but not of Europe – than any other nation.

### Fig 1. Supranational feelings



In addition, national, European and global identifications are not mutually exclusive (see Fig. 2). Those who identify with Europe and the world are also those who report high levels of national identity, including in the UK.

**Fig. 2. Average national feeling according to country of residence and supranational self-identifications**

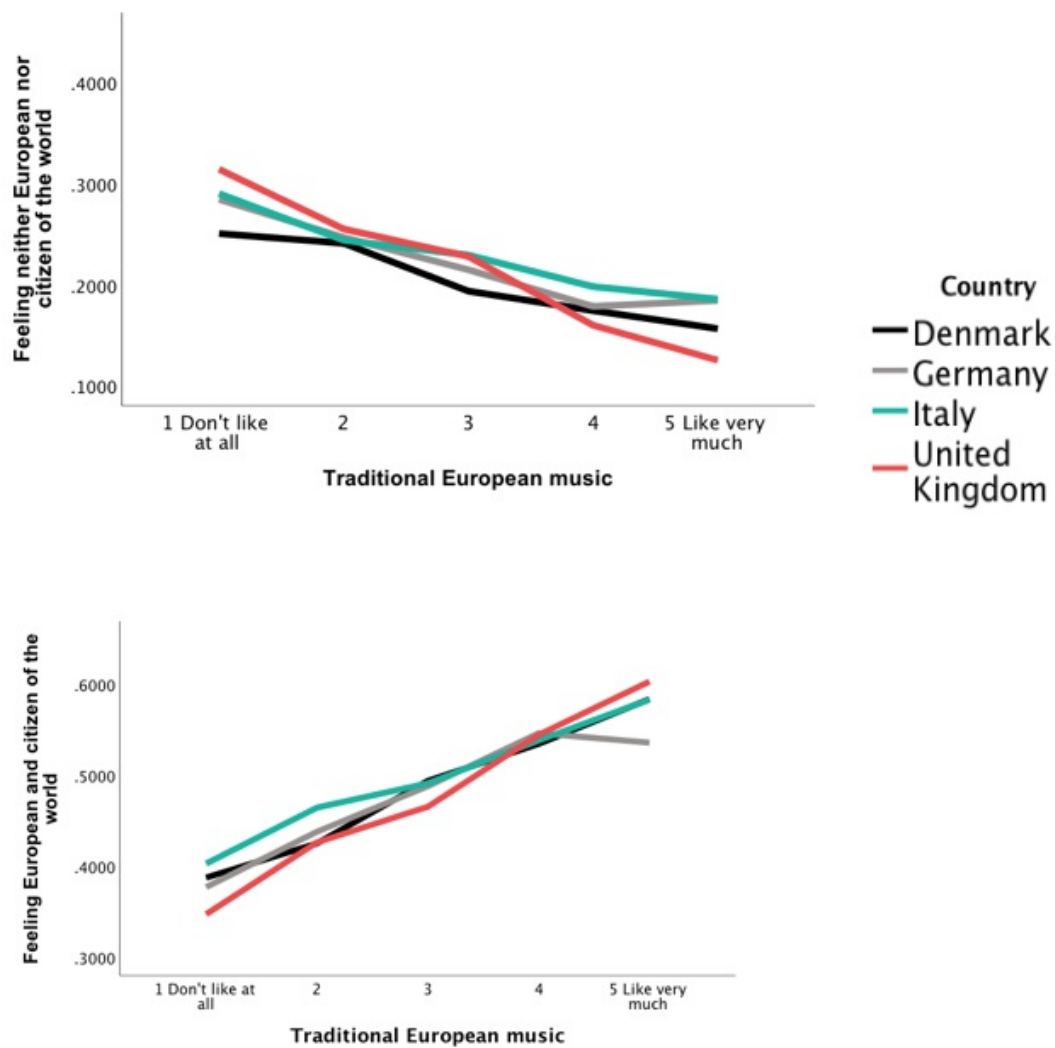


## The UK in comparison: feelings and networks, mobility and cultural consumption practices

We also sought to assess how feeling European and/or a citizen of the world is associated with mobility practices, social networks, and cultural consumption and competence. We compared the UK with Denmark, Germany, and Italy, covering that way different parts of Europe. What does it tell us about the UK's differences?

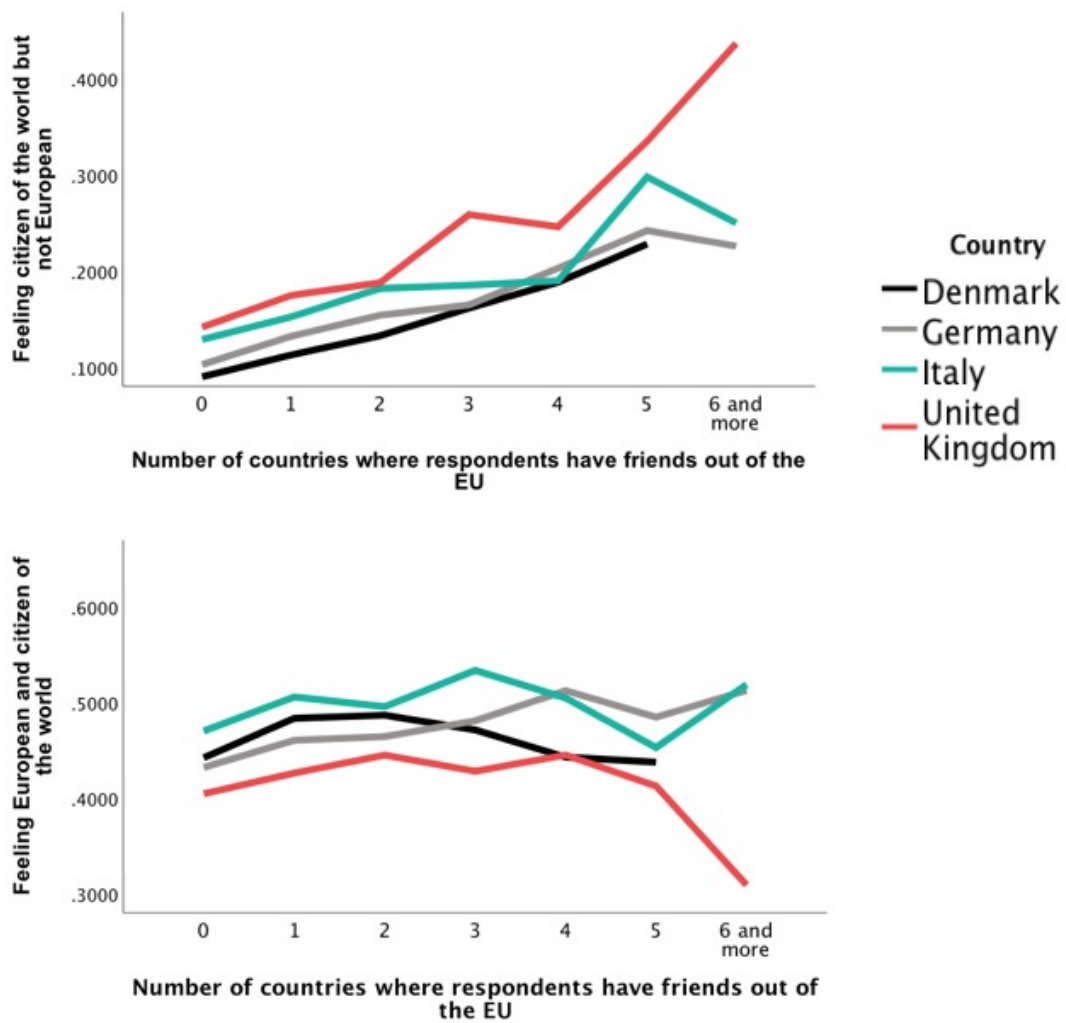
The UK follows similar trends to other countries, and is in a way not that different. Yet its position is particular for two reasons. First, network, consumption, and socio-demographic variables induce a greater variation among British citizens in terms of supranational feelings, compared to the other countries. In the UK, contact with a foreign environment has an especially important role to play. Even some mobility practices, especially outside the EU, become significant in the U.K. (see Fig. 7-8), while they tend to matter less for Europeans in general. Cultural consumption practices, such as musical tastes (see Fig. 3-4) or television watching, are important, especially for feeling both European and a citizen of the world. Their significance suggests that people can be more cosmopolitan and European if they can feel part of a larger community which shares some cultural communality.

**Fig. 3-4. Taste for traditional and folk music from European countries (other than the country of residence) and predicted probabilities of supranational identities**



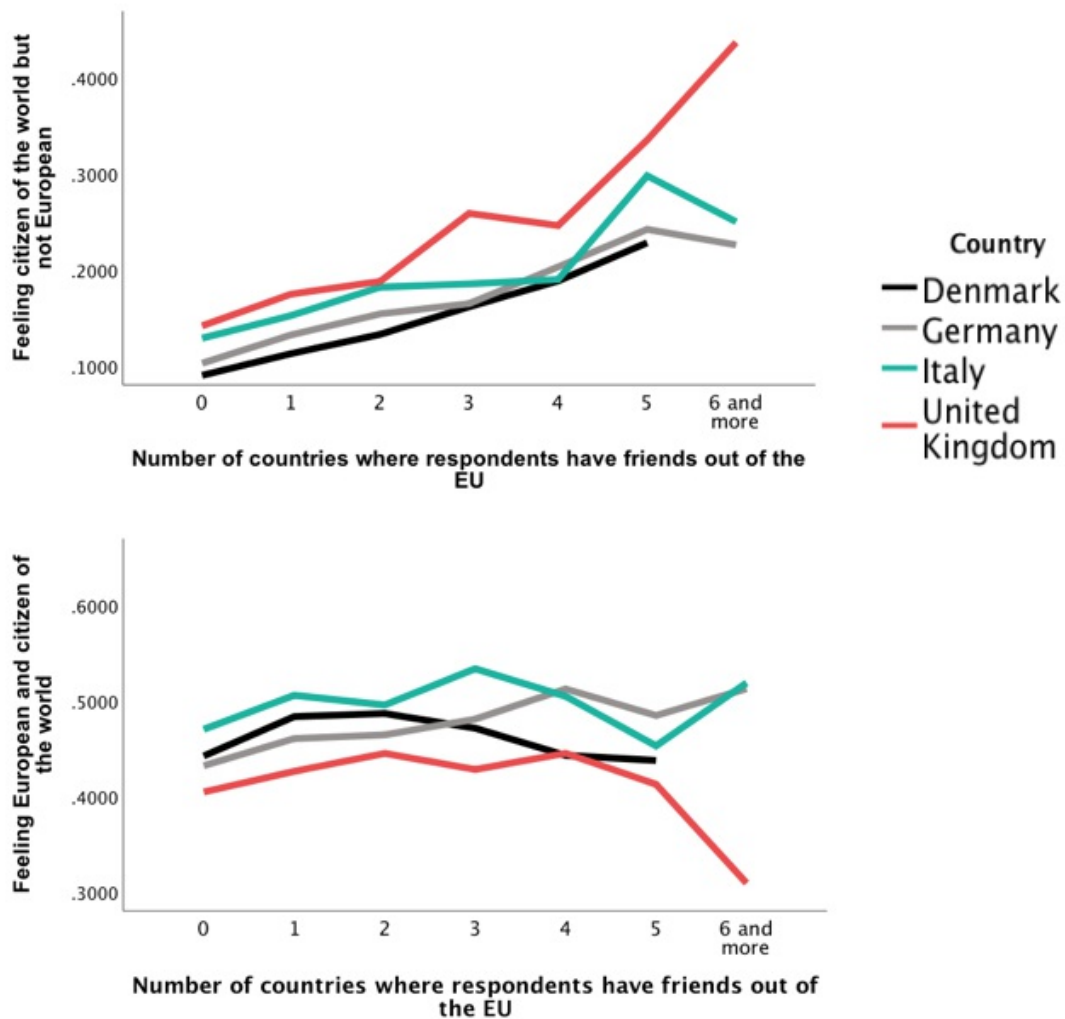
Second, geographical boundaries are more relevant for the links between practices and supranational identities in the U.K. than in the other countries. Britain arguably sees clearer differentiation between the forces of globalisation and Europeanisation. European-centred activities, such as buying in the EU or listening to traditional European music (Fig. 3-4), are associated more directly with pro-European feelings than in other nations. Similarly, there are greater differentiations between those with and without relationships with parts of the world outside the EU (through, for instance, having friends or making trips outside the EU) among Britons than for other Europeans (e.g. Fig. 5-6).

**Fig. 5-6. Friends from outside the EU and supranational identities**



Likewise, in the UK, the more someone visits places outside the EU, the more she or he feels a citizen of the world and not European (Fig. 7-8).

**Fig. 7-8. Number of trips outside the EU and supranational identities**



The crucial issue seems to be the bifurcation between two different kinds of global networks, one looking to the former empire, the other to Europe. Compared to other research which indicates that younger Britons were more likely to vote in favour of staying in the EU, our data do not show a significant relationship between age and supranational feelings. Hence a Remain vote may have been justified by other – maybe more pragmatic – reasons than feeling European. There is, however, a very strong effect of educational qualifications for all kinds of transnational identities in the UK, while this is almost absent in all the other countries investigated.

In conclusion, we found strong internal divisions about how people feel towards Europe and towards the world, which are ingrained in historical and cultural dynamics and tensions specific to the UK. It may therefore be wrong to see Brexit voters as simple nationalists. The British case, we argue, reflects the ongoing power of extra-European ties (especially those associated with imperial Anglophone connections), rather than being a simple protest of those 'left behind' by globalisation.

*This post represents the views of the author and not those of the Brexit blog, nor the LSE.*

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